

The Patriot Ledger, Wed. Dec. 26, 1979

Ezra Weston of Duxbury

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In the days before East Boston became so important, Duxbury was one of the greatest shipbuilding centers, and vessels from this town sailed into every commercial port of the world.

Ezra Weston of Duxbury was one of the largest ship owners and shipbuilders in the country. Residents of the area used to say that the letters "E" "W" "N" "S" on the weather vane of one of the buildings in Weston's yard stood for "Ezra Weston's New Ship," for it was rare not to find a new ship building on the stocks.



As Weston owned his own shipyard, sail loft, rope walk, spar yard and blacksmith shop, he was given the name "King Caesar," and the street that ran by his house was called King Caesar's Road.

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Between his shipyards and the sea ran the country road, and on the days of launchings, ways had to be constructed across the highway, with traffic obliged to go through the fields around the yard. School was always dismissed on these occasions so that the children could witness the event.

In the times of Ezra Weston, every aspect of life in Duxbury related to the sea. Even the schoolhouse was built on a marsh, and was so low that at high tides the water came up through the floor boards for the children to wade in. We are told that the schoolboys used to fish for minnows through the cracks in the floor during recess.

After finishing school, many Duxbury lads went to work in Weston's rope walk, well described by the following stanza:

In that building long and low,
With its windows all a-row,
Like the port-holes of a hulk,
Human spiders spin and spin,
Backward down their threads so thin
Dropping, each a hempen bulk.

After serving an apprenticeship in the workshop, those who wanted to follow the sea were given the chance of shipping as cabin boys, then as sailors, gradually working their way up to a higher position. Any short cut from one of the lower positions to that of ship master was thought to be not quite right, and was usually referred to as "getting in through the cabin windows." Many Duxbury men reached the top of this profession.

Ezra Weston was interested in over 80 vessels and was, indeed, a most capable builder and merchant, although he may have been somewhat illiterate, if we are to judge him by his unique spelling of coffee as "kauphy."

Weston's son, of the same name, became a partner of the firm in 1798 and continued the business from his father's death in 1822 until 1842, when his three sons, Ezra Jr., G.B. and A.B., were taken into partnership. This firm was in existence 93 years, its last offices being on Commercial Wharf.